

INTRODUCTION

The 2008-09 Voting Assistance Guide

The *Voting Assistance Guide* (VAG) is a compilation of absentee voting regulations, laws, deadlines, and procedures. The *Guide* is the primary source of information for citizens covered by the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* who seek to understand the procedures for registering to vote, requesting a ballot, and voting in their state or territory of legal residence. Chapter One gives a general overview of the Voting Assistance Officer position and responsibilities. Chapter Two discusses the absentee voting process for *UOCAVA* voters. Chapter Three contains state-by-state procedures for both military and overseas voters. The Appendices provide additional reference materials.

Voting Assistance Officers (VAO) and persons who provide assistance to citizens covered under the *UOCAVA* should become familiar with this *Guide*, forms, and available assistance and resources.

Purpose and Scope

The *Voting Assistance Guide* is designed to act as a manual for both Voting Assistance Officers and individual citizens covered by the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*. Its purpose is to help facilitate voting by *UOCAVA* citizens in U.S. primary, run-off, special, and general elections during 2008 and 2009, whether by absentee ballot or in person at the polls.

The appearance of external internet links in this *Guide* does not constitute endorsement by the United States Federal Government, United States Department of Defense or the Federal Voting Assistance Program of the linked web sites, or the information, products or services contained therein. The Federal Voting Assistance Program does not exercise any editorial control over the information you may find at these locations.

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)

The Director, Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) in the Department of Defense, is responsible for administering the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* (42 USC Sec. 1973ff) on behalf of the Secretary of Defense, who is the Presidential designee for the Federal functions of the law.

The *UOCAVA* allows the following U.S. citizens to vote absentee:

- Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services (on active duty) and merchant marine,

- Their family members, and
- U.S. citizens residing outside the U.S.

Members of the U.S. Uniformed Services or merchant marine and their family members may vote absentee while away from their place of voting residence, wherever stationed, inside or outside the United States.

U.S. citizens residing outside the United States and its territories may vote in the state or territory where they last resided immediately prior to departing the United States, even if many years have elapsed and the citizen maintains no residence in the state or territory and the intent to return to that state or territory may not be certain.

The *UOCAVA* covers over six million potential voters worldwide.

The *UOCAVA* requires states and territories to allow the groups listed above to register and vote absentee in elections for Federal offices. In addition, many states and territories have developed their own laws allowing citizens covered by the *UOCAVA* to register and vote absentee in state and local elections as well.

The *UOCAVA* requires each Federal department and agency with personnel covered by the *UOCAVA* to have a voting assistance program. The FVAP biennial Voting Action Plan and the Department of Defense Directive 1000.4 establish policy and guidelines for carrying out an effective voting assistance program. More information on the *UOCAVA* can be found in Appendix A.

FVAP Mission and Goals

The goals of the Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) and military and civilian VAOs worldwide are to:

- inform and educate U.S. citizens worldwide of their right to vote,
- foster voting participation,
- protect the integrity of, and enhance, the electoral process at the federal, state and local levels, and
- promote effectiveness and efficiency in the administration of the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)*.

In carrying out the responsibilities of the *UOCAVA*, the FVAP provides information and materials to *UOCAVA* citizens to help ensure their enfranchisement and promote understanding and participation in the democratic process. Program activities range from the development of the universal Federal Post Card Application, Standard Form 76 (FPCA, SF 76) which is accepted by all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories, and serves as both an application for voter registration and/or a request

for an absentee ballot, and the production and worldwide distribution of print, broadcast and electronic voter education and information services.

The FVAP strives to simplify the registration and absentee voting process while maintaining its integrity by developing and maintaining working relationships with the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories and other Federal government agencies.

FVAP Has Many Resources

Absentee voters and Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) have available to them the following resources:

- **www.fvap.gov** - provides an overview of the FVAP as well as electronic access to many of the materials listed in this section. In addition, the site provides election information, access to the online FPCA, and links to state government home pages and other sites with election information and results.
- **Contact the FVAP** - VAOs, *UOCAVA* citizens and local election officials may contact the FVAP directly via email, telephone or fax. The email address is **vote@fvap.ncr.gov**. The toll-free numbers in the U.S. are **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, DSN (military) **425-1584** or Commercial **(703) 588-1584**. International toll-free phone numbers are listed on the inside back cover and on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov**. The fax number is **(703) 696-1352**.
- **Electronic Alternatives to the “By-Mail” Absentee Voting Process - Electronic Transmission Service (ETS)** - faxes (and emails) of election materials (FPCAs, blank ballots, voted ballots, other election materials) where allowed by state law, between the local election official and the absentee voter when conditions do not allow for timely receipt and return of these materials via the postal system. Because ETS procedures vary from state to state, refer to the state pages in Chapter Three for details.

If electronic transmission is allowed by the state or territory, the FVAP recommends faxing using the following numbers: **(703) 693-5527; DSN (military) 223-5527 or 1-800-368-8683**. International toll-free fax numbers are listed on the inside back cover. If emailing is allowed, the citizen should email voting materials directly to the local election official. If the citizen is unable to access the local election official's email address, he or she may email the voting

materials (along with the transmittal sheet provided in appendix B) via the Electronic Transmission Service to: **ets@fvap.ncr.gov**. If a citizen experiences technical problems when faxing or emailing the FPCA or ballot to the Electronic Transmission Service, he or she may contact the FVAP (see “Contact the FVAP” above).

After faxing or emailing, most states request that the citizen mail the original completed and signed FPCA or voted ballot to the local election official. (See Electronic Transmission of Election Materials in Appendix B.)

- **DoD Voting Information Center (VIC)** - an automated telephone system maintained and operated by the FVAP. The Voting Information Center (VIC) provides a 24 hour recorded service with information on current and upcoming elections and the ability to transfer to the office of incumbent U.S. Senators, U.S. Representatives, State Governors and State Chief Election Officials.

The VIC also serves as a means for all VAOs to communicate with their Service Voting Action Officer and civilian VAOs to communicate with the Department of State Voting Action Officer.

The VIC can be reached toll-free in the U.S. at **1-800-438-VOTE (8683)**, **DSN (military) 425-1343**, **commercial (703) 588-1343** or by using the international toll-free numbers listed on the inside back cover of this *Guide* and on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov**. To access the full capabilities of the VIC, callers must use a touch-tone phone.

- **Voting News Releases** - time-sensitive periodic news releases that inform and educate VAOs and *UOCAVA* citizens about the latest critical information on election dates, absentee registration, ballot request, and voting procedures. For example, if a state or territory makes a change to its procedures or election dates during the year, or a special election for a Federal office is called, a news release would be issued to alert citizens of these events.

Voting news releases are sent directly via email to VAOs. Anyone can request the releases simply by sending an email to **vote@fvap.ncr.gov**. Persons on this list will also receive the *Voting Information News* (see *Voting Information News* on the next page). Releases are also available on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov**.

- ***Voting Information News (VIN)*** - a monthly newsletter published by the FVAP, which contains up-to-date articles and information on elections, absentee registration and voting procedures, a “To Do” list for VAOs, and other voting related matters that may affect *UOCAVA* citizens. The newsletter is sent to all civilian and military VAOs by email or regular mail. Anyone can request the *VIN* by simply sending an email to **vote@fvap.ncr.gov**. Persons on this list will also receive Voting News Releases. Current and back issues are also available on the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov**.
- **Training** - FVAP conducts in-person workshops for training VAOs at various locations around the globe. The training highlights instructions for completing the forms, responsibilities of the VAO and the resources available to conduct a successful voting assistance program. There are two slightly different versions of the workshop. One focuses on the duties and responsibilities of VAOs in the Uniformed Services, while the other version is for VAOs at embassies and consulates as well as U.S. citizen organizations and corporations outside the United States. These train-the-trainer workshops enable VAOs to provide additional local training. The FVAP also provides workshops twice a month at the headquarters office in Washington D.C. Contact the FVAP for dates and locations.

A training workshop presentation is available for VAOs at the FVAP’s website. VAOs should check the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov** for updates on other learning opportunities.

- **Election Dates and Motivational Posters** - The 2008 Election Dates poster lists the dates for Federal office and state primaries, runoff elections and the general election. In addition, this poster has a place at the bottom for the VAO’s name, telephone number and email address. VAOs should display the poster prominently so individuals will know how to contact them. Election dates by state and by month are available in Appendix I. Check the state election website or the FVAP website for updates.

To help promote voter awareness and stimulate interest in voting, the FVAP provides posters that contain a motivational message obtained from the FVAP Slogan Contest.

Military VAOs receive these posters through their normal distribution channels (see Appendix H). Overseas citizens can obtain posters directly from the FVAP. These posters are also available for downloading from the FVAP website at **www.fvap.gov**.

- **Get Out the Vote Campaign.** - Produced by the FVAP, in cooperation with The Advertising Council, this campaign consists of motivational public service announcements encouraging U.S. citizens worldwide to register and vote and stay active in the process. These are available in print, audio, and video formats for use by state and local officials, as well as by VAOs in local media worldwide. Call the FVAP or visit the FVAP website for more details (see the inside front cover for contact information).

